Remarks of Ambassador Bleich to Bnai Brith, Sydney

(As prepared for delivery – May 16, 2010)

Good evening. Thank you Len, Diana, Rabbi Wolff for that introduction, and thank you to Bnai Brith and Rabbi Wolff for inviting me to speak to you tonight. It is a great privilege to be here.

When Ernie Friedlander extended this invitation for me to give the Human Rights Oration, I was of course honored, and I told him I looked forward to addressing issues of peace and faith. I asked him how long he'd like me to speak, and he said about an hour. I thought, well that would be one way to achieve peace and faith: Because during an hour-long oration, most people would be asleep, and those who weren't would be praying for me to end. I plan to take a page from history instead and learn the lesson of President Harrison. He gave the longest Inaugural Address in U.S. history – speaking for over two hours in the cold in D.C. He caught a cold and died 32 days later. So tonight I will speak for only 20 minutes or so and then open this up for questions and answers.

I have been asked to speak tonight about securing peace. Apparently the organizers thought it would be nice to give me an easy topic; one that no generation in human history has ever been able to answer. But it is a good and important question – how do we make the world more peaceful. And so I'm grateful for the opportunity to discuss it with you tonight.

I'm sure that the organizers expected me to address this topic as the United States Ambassador to Australia and as the President's representative of the great U.S. Australia security alliance. But to the extent that any of us thinks seriously about peace, we can't do it adequately based on just one perspective or our most recent title. What securing peace means and how we achieve it requires the whole of our human experience. So tonight, I want to talk to you about it as a diplomat, but also as a lawyer who devoted a career to resolving conflicts peacefully, as a father whose children are coming of age in an uncertain world, and as a Jew whose own family tree was brutally chopped and nearly destroyed in a World War. My goal is not merely to talk about how U.S. policy seeks to promote peace, but to put it in a larger context because I think the only thing that makes peace possible is the human capacity for perspective.

First, we need be clear what we mean by peace. Peace to me is not the absence of conflict or the absence of power. Conflict and power struggle is inevitable. We live in a world of limited resources, unequal distribution, different ideas, traditions, and beliefs. It is inevitable that some of these differences are going to create tensions between people and some person or group will always seek to bend others to their will. As a father of three, conflict is pretty much part of my breakfast table every morning. As a lawyer, my job was basically to deal with other people's conflicts full-time. No one hires a lawyer because they find themselves living in perfect harmony. And as a person who worked in the White House and dealt with Congress, and now is in international relations, conflicts are pretty much the air I breathe.

And conflict is not just inevitable; it is good. It is how we progress. It reflects our diversity. Human progress doesn't come from working with people who think and live exactly as we do; but engaging with those who think and live as we don't, and discovering what is good and admirable in them. After you work with people for a while, the diplomats who I meet from other nations are no longer Indonesians, or Sri Lankans, or Papuans, or Chinese — they are people. People just like anyone else with their own individual styles and stories, and birthdays and loved ones and favorite foods. I can disagree with them, sometimes strongly, without having to demonize them or ignore their essential humanity. I can even learn from them. Often the process of disagreement is what leads to a better result, and to a deeper understanding.

So conflict is inevitable and it is generally a good thing. So when I imagine peace, I do not imagine a world without conflict, I don't imagine a Utopia where we all hold hands and sing kumbaya. I imagine a world in which conflict is real and constant, but it is managed in a way that doesn't provoke violence. To me, a peaceful world is a world in which people go to bed at night expecting that no matter what challenges we face, they can find a solution and they won't have to kill or be killed to do it.

For peace to exist, we all must agree on at least that, on the simple point that it is better to solve a problem without violence than with violence – even if it means all of us get a little less of what we want. In short we must agree that each human life has dignity. That your life is no less important than mine. Our Constitutions, our great religions, our history and philosophies all come down to this very simple concept. Thomas Jefferson enshrined it in America's Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal and they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. The right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." America rejected British Rule in favor of a new form of government not because of some policy difference. It was because Britain had forsaken this fundamental duty of society: to respect the rights of all citizens equally. We all have the right to live and to be free. We may not have a right to be happy, but we have the same right as everyone else to pursue

happiness – something that requires give and take. This is the essence of what our two Governments are there to do – to protect these human rights. Australians and Americans believe in these values to their core. It is what we demand of our governments, and it is what our governments demand of the world.

But declaring a peaceful philosophy is easier than actually securing peace. Most of us wish it were that simple: that we could simply describe the essential wisdom and fairness of resolving conflict without violence, and that the peoples of the world would unclench their fists, lay down their arms, stop abusing one another, and find ways to work through whatever conflicts they face. But it is not simple, and our greatest prophets of peace, whether it is Mahatma Ghandi, or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. have always understood this and urged us not to be naive. Peace to them was not just about loving your fellow man but also about Power. The pursuit of happiness means having the means, the power, to ensure that you had a fair go. It takes real power, and the machinery of power – law and law enforcement -- to ensure Peace. Love and power aren't in conflict with each other – they are part of one another. As Dr. King said:

"Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic."

That is why in my house, we keep peace in part by being reasonable with our kids and urging them to try to live up to their better selves, but also through power. It could be as simple as the power of disapproval by not talking to them, or not giving them something they expected, or taking something away. The one thing we do not do is use physical force, and we'd only use it to save someone from harm. As a Jew, my faith teaches tolerance and non-violence, but our history has also taught the need to be vigilant and to be prepared to use power against those who would do us harm. This is the philosophy of the United States as well. As a diplomat, I try to persuade based on logic and shared long-term goals, but if that does not work we rely on power in all of its forms, whether it is isolation, sanctions, incentives, and the last thing we use – the last thing we should ever use – is physical force.

B'nai B'rith itself has been an example of this. I still recall as a child, on March 9, 1977, when armed American Muslim gunmen invaded B'nai B'rith headquarters in Washington DC and took members of this society hostage. The leader of the gunmen, Hamas Abdul Khaalis, wanted vengeance because he disagreed with the Jewish judge in the trial of his children's murderers. There was a stand-off inside the B'nai B'rith headquarters with the gunmen threatening to kill hostages if the police entered, and Jews and Muslims exchanging accusations. Three Muslim ambassadors from Egypt, Pakistan and Iran offered to enter the B'nai B'rith building and negotiate with the leader. They reminded the gunmen of the common values of the Islamic and Jewish faiths. They read to the

gunmen passages from the Quran that they said demonstrated Islam's compassion and mercy. They reminded the gunmen that the lives of the hostages were no less precious than their own or those of their leader's slain children. And they listened to the gunmen's grievances and let them be heard. They relied on common values to rekindle compassion and tolerance, and to convince Khaalis that he would solve nothing by taking the lives of his hostages or making police take his life. They preached love, and they spoke from power and they convinced the gunmen to lay down their weapons and surrender. They used the force of the police as the back-stop to remind us all of the consequences of not resolving our conflicts peacefully.

As in that case, power comes in many forms including faith. Force works when we use it in a way that will secure a lasting peace. The mistake that people too often make is in thinking superior force alone secures a lasting peace. If that were true the defeat of Germany in World War I would have prevented World War II. But no war is won until there is real peace. Wars without reconstruction and reconciliation do not end. They don't lead to peace, they lead to more war.

The measure of success in any battle is ultimately in the peace that follows.

Our job, and what we must demand of our leaders, is always to remember this. You know, like most people – especially guys – I like to mix it up. I played football and wrestled and had my share of fights. As a lawyer, my favorite stories were always about some of my heated courtroom battles; the adrenaline of it, the tension, and the feeling of vindication. And there were times – honestly, when the other side had done something sleazy or dishonest, when they had inflicted pain for no good reason – that all I wanted to do was leave a hurt on them that would never heal. It would have felt good at the time. But no matter how good it would have felt, it wasn't why I was there. It wasn't going to solve the problem; in fact, it was going to prolong the problem. It would have made it harder for the parties to reconcile, because it would have been just one more grievance to overcome. While lawyers and diplomats love to use metaphors about destroying their adversaries — cutting them off at the knees, kicking their butts, thumping them, etc. — the true miracle is that we didn't do this. Time and again we helped end differences without violence and force. Anyone can take a cheap shot. What is extraordinary – what moves us forward as a people – is having the discipline to resolve even the fiercest differences among ourselves without further violence and without recurrence.

This universal truth — that the measure of success in any battle is the peace that follows — transcends every discipline. We see it revealed not just in the lives of lawyers and diplomats, but also world leaders, scientists, soldiers and ministers. President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address concluded by exhorting that "both sides join in creating . . . a new world of law, where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace

preserved." Dr. King told us that "[s]ooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace." And General George Marshall, who saw on the battlefields better than any of us the true costs of living in an uncivil world, urged that "there must be effort of the spirit — to be magnanimous, to act in friendship, to strive to help rather than to hinder. There must be effort of analysis to seek out the causes of war and the factors which favor peace, [for it is on] those great undertakings . . . which world equilibrium will depend."

Australian and U.S. policy in the world today is guided by this principle. Today, most of the nations of the world and most of the people of the world live together without violence. Toward those nations, the U.S. and Australia is providing building blocks of sustained peace whether it is humanitarian aid, economic development, or just enforcing the rule of law. This is why we are giving millions of dollars to the people of Haiti, why we supporting development in Africa, why we have established courts to try war criminals. We belong to large multinational organizations whether it is the World Trade Organization, the World Health Organization, the UN, or regional groups like APEC, ASEAN, the G-20, whose only goal is to create peaceful orderly means for nations to work out their differences. This past month together we announced one of the most important steps in this effort ever – a path to eliminating nuclear weapons, including a commitment to remove all loose nukes in the next four years.

In other nations, we see Governments moving in the wrong direction – trying to ignore the rule of law and take their countries toward more violent ways of resolving conflicts. Iran and North Korea unfortunately appear to be doing this. Both of these nations had signed agreements, along with the U.S. and Australia and virtually all of the other nations of the world, to end the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In return nations with nuclear weapons agreed to reduce their arsenals and ultimately eliminate these weapons altogether. The nuclear nations have kept to this bargain as have all of the other signatories to the treaty . . . except for these two nations. And so we have engaged as a world in enforcing the treaty. Today we are using all means short of force of accomplishing that -- economic sanctions, isolation, and other means of persuasion to get these countries back in line. But this is a situation where our physical power is a necessary deterrent to these nations pursuing a violent path.

In those nations where we are today in armed conflict, we have not lost sight of the goal which is to promote a lasting peace. Tonight young Australian and American soldiers are fighting in Afghanistan. But they are there with police officers and engineers and teachers and diplomats, and their goal is to allow the Afghani people to have life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our conflict is no longer with the Afghani government. Instead, we are working with their government to help make those nations safe enough to give their people a chance at a free, civil society.

Finally, in nations where there is serious conflict, we are working with both governments to get them to work toward a lasting peace. History demonstrates that ultimately the most bitter differences between nations will resolve. This is true at every level, not just nations. Companies that were bitter rivals have now merged and are working together. Our neighbors who detest each other discover that their children are in love and now they are joined as families. In the last election, the President's rivals in the election, Senator Biden and Senator Clinton are now his Vice-President and Secretary of State. Americans began to acknowledge that the Red States and the Blue States need to start working together again to solve our common challenges. The people we believe today in the heat of battle are crazy and irrational may one day be our colleagues, our in-laws, our friends, our allies.

This isn't just desireable; it is inevitable. In Iraq today, the Shiite and the Sunni and the Kurds share common land and names and relatives and fears. They can't avoid each other; they can't eliminate each other. They must learn to live together. Just as the Hutus and the Tutsis, and the Serbs and Croats have somehow — despite all the atrocities — learned to live together. Just as the Protestants and the Catholics in Northern Ireland have learned to live together. And just as Israelis and Palestineans will at some point have to learn how to live together. If history has taught us nothing else, it is that eventually — no matter how deep or fierce our differences — we must always do what laws are meant to help us do in the first place: find a way to live together.

And this brings me to the point on which I started: perspective. I think sometimes we get the best perspective by viewing the history of our planet with both time and distance. Dr. Carl Sagan offered these thoughts about a picture from the outer reaches of galaxy showing the planets and stars and comets. In the photo our planet appears as just a small blue dot. He said, "Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and in triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of that dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of the dot on scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner of the dot. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. To my mind, there is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly and compassionately with one another and to preserve and cherish that pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."

When we step back like this, and have perspective, we see that we are, in the end, just cousins, sharing a small wonderful journey for a short number of years. Reminding ourselves of these facts — allowing ourselves the perspective to think beyond the immediate slight or hurt or frustration to see a way to resolve a dispute without bloodshed

— is what makes all virtues possible. This is true of wisdom, faith, courage and most of all forgiveness. They are all, ultimately, about perspective.

The perspective to admit what we have done and acknowledge our mistakes, so that others won't suffer the way we did — we call that wisdom.

The perspective to see that we share bonds with people we've never met, and never will meet, who look and sound and act different than we do. We call that faith.

The perspective to take a risk — not because we need to but because it is the right thing to do — we call that courage. We can also call that sacrifice.

And when we have the perspective to know that our enemies today may be our friends tomorrow, and that we can't saddle our children with the hurts of our past, we call that forgiveness.

We serve best when we remember that everyone, our adversaries no less than our friends, is a human being. We do our greatest service not when we manage to shout over or stifle the voice of another, but when we use our strength to reconnect a voice that has been silenced. Conflicts will never go away — they are inevitable. But the special gift we can offer is in dealing with those conflicts with the wisdom, courage, faith and forgiveness to not merely decide the issue, but to allow friends and foe to go on afterward with dignity. That is the true meaning of love and power, and it is ultimately the path to peace.